

WORK LINK

VOLUME 1

A PUBLICATION FOR WORKER
CO-OPERATIVES IN N.S.W.

NO: 4

AUG. 1980.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

The response to the issues of Worklink recently distributed has so far, been quite good. But we are most anxious to receive more feedback, so more comments please. We propose converting the layout to newspaper column style as soon as possible, reduce the print size and head each page/column so it will be more easily recognisable and digestable.

The proposed headings are:-

1. "From Us In Here To You Out There" (Editorial)
2. "We'd Like To Say" (Co-op Contribution)
3. "Imagine....." (Education Material)
4. "What's New" (Products and Ideas)
5. "Try It This Way" (Management Help)
6. "Oh! The Lovely Money" (Commercial Page)
7. "Who Said That" (Interviews)
8. "Have We Got A Deal For You" (For Sale etc.)

ACCOMODATION

Remember the conference on August 29th and 30th, 1980. People travelling to this event will require accomodation in Sydney. Please send offers of board (for 2 nights) to the Conference Organisers at this address. Those who wish hotel/motel accomodation arranged on their behalf should also contact us. Get to it as it's only a month away.

THE ABORIGINAL WORK CO-OPERATIVE

A tree grew in Brooklyn.....okay, so what!

The Aboriginal Work Co-operative Committee has something just as interesting - our dedication to the advancement of Aborigines by way of assistance in the developing of Aboriginal Work Co-operatives.

Following a successful submission to the N.S.W. Government by Tranby, Co-operative for Aborigines Ltd, a Development Officer was able to be appointed to the Committee.

Currently, our energies are put to advantage assisting Aborigines in the outer Western Sydney area of Mt. Druitt. We are in the midst of organising a Production and Marketing Co-operative, which will initially involve Aboriginal Artifacts designed for the tourist market. Our natural progression will lead into handcrafted traditional articles made from bush timber for e.g: brigalow, gidgee and mulga. Any ideas from persons who are able to supply such timbers will be greatly received. Our further developments shall take place in the form of wooden toy, furniture and any woodwork related areas that we find to be viable.

(P.T.O)

Joe Sedges from Horan Wall and Walker, a Media Information Agency has been most supportive and arranged free of charge promotion, advertising on 2JJ, Ethnic radio, 2EA and a small coverage in their Weekly Community Information Booklet. Joe's awareness of the Aboriginal Work Co-operative Committee simply came about by seeing our name in the Sydney Morning Herald along with the other Co-operatives. Horan Wall and Walker have greatly assisted us by making more people aware of our service.

We have been approached by persons from Bourke, Wilcannia, Taree and the South Coast. Due to these enquiries, we have even been able to arrange our very first 'cultural exchange' which was made possible by Harry Cooley who is an Aborigine and resides at Mt. Druitt. Harry designed and made an engraving instrument (free of charge) for a group of Aboriginal women in Bourke, who were having great difficulties in obtaining their requirement and thus approached the A.W.C.C. for assistance, who were able to arrange for Bourke and Mt. Druitt to help one another. We are most grateful to the N.S.W. Government for this unique opportunity to create and promote Aboriginal Work Co-operatives.

WORK AND PLAY

Work today but not tomorrow,
Wages go then you borrow.
On the dole or not,
That, puts you on the spot.
Work today and tomorrow.

Find a job, get a wage
Get a bob and have a rage
Work by day, play by night.
Work by night, play by day.
Who cares? Either way!

Work is fun
Just getting it done
So is play
And getting away in the sun

BOB BOYD (BONDI WORK CO-OP)

Notice seen pinned to a door in the five story building belonging to Project one, a Workers Collective of 120 in San Francisco.

The 4th floor show room leaks and floods the bathroom. The 3rd floor toilet hasn't worked since July. The purpose of this notice is not to encourage anyone to fix the stuff, but rather to get everybody to feel upset and discouraged and pissed off and guilty so we can hold a meeting and appoint a committee which will hold another meeting and argue and.....

Keep in mind that even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION COURSE

One of the essential conditions for the successful formation of Co-operatives is the proper informing and educating of would be members in the principles and practices of Co-operative work. As an aid to Co-operative management, in each of the next twelve issues of "Worklink" there will be one lesson from "An Educational Course for Pre-Co-operative Members."

These lessons will be:-

- Lesson 1: What are your employment problems?
- Lesson 2: How to solve your problems by Co-operative action.
- Lesson 3: How to organize Co-operative action.
- Lesson 4: Various kinds of Work Co-operatives.
- Lesson 5: Advantages of self help.
- Lesson 6: Basic Co-operative principles.
- Lesson 7: How to become a member of a Co-operative.
- Lesson 8: Rights and obligations of members.
- Lesson 9: How to work together in a Co-operative.
- Lesson 10: By-laws made by and binding on members.
- Lesson 11: Why and how to participate in a general meeting.
- Lesson 12: Duties and responsibilities of office bearers in a Co-operative society.

The German Development Assistance for Social Housing's handbook "Pre-member Education Course for Housing Co-operatives", is the acknowledged source for much of the general material contained in these lessons. Further information can be obtained from the Information Worker, Work Co-operative Unit, Y.A.C.S.

LESSON 1

WHAT ARE YOUR EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS?

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SOLVE THEM?

1. DO YOU HAVE PROBLEMS?

- Do you think that work is easy to find?
- Do you have a range of skills and work experience?
- Do you see any possibility of working in your own business?
- Is there any hope for a better situation in the future?

If your answers to all these questions are "no", then you should start to think.

What could you do to improve this situation?

- You could try to improve your job finding skill, work skills or education standards.
 - You could ask the Government to ensure that work is available for all who want it.
 - You could try to obtain assistance in starting your own business.
- Or what? As an isolated individual does the prospect of achieving your goal of a permanent job seem poor?

The only chance to reach your aims is to look out for people who have the same problems and difficulties as you and to form or to join an organization for group action.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR SOCIAL PROBLEMS?

Your position as an individual in dealing with everyday unemployment situations is low. Important people not taking much interest in your problems?

In view of this, you ask yourself:

- Am I able to represent my own interests in an effective manner?
- Can I protect myself against unfair treatment?
- Do I have a position in society with which I am satisfied?

If your answers to all these questions are again "no", you should start to think.
(P.T.O)

You could strengthen your position by organizing a group or by joining an organized group of people who have the same problems as you. Experience gained by people like you in many countries all over the world has shown that:

- Group actions to defend legitimate interests are more efficient than actions undertaken by individuals.
- Group actions interest the politicians, the newspapers, the radio. Thus, your problems may receive the attention of the public and of Government.
- As a member of an organized group you will be able to select the most capable men or women among yourselves to act on your behalf as your elected representatives.

Acting jointly and with good representation you can achieve things that you could never achieve alone.

3. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SOLVE YOUR EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS?

- If you stay at home and grumble nothing will change, nobody will listen to your problems.
- If you complain as an individual, this will have little or no effect.
- As we have discussed, things may turn out different if you bring together people who have the same problems as you and if you organize them in a group. Then you can do something yourself to solve some of your problems by joint action:
 - Represent the interest of all members of the group in dealings with employers, the Government and the public,
 - Organize mutual assistance between the members,
 - Organize self-help actions to improve your situation,
 - Organize community life, create and maintain community facilities.

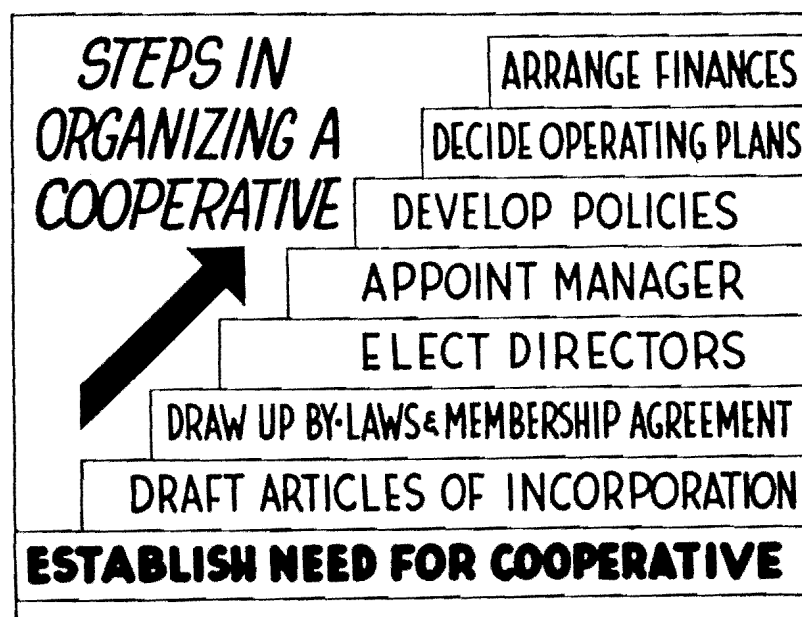
So what we have learnt in this first lesson is that group action is your only chance to become stronger.

Group action is more effective than individual action.

Group action receives more attention by Government and by the public than action of individuals.

The next question is: How can you organize such a group of people with interest in common?

This question will be dealt with in the next issue: "How to solve your employment problems with Co-operative action."



A WORKERS CO-OPERATIVE IN FRANCE: DECEMBER, 1979,

(VISITED BY ALAN GREIG, Y.A.C.S.)

Just before Christmas, 1979, I visited a Workers Co-operative in St Laurent-de-Cerdans, a small town (3000 pop.) in the Pyrenees mountains of France not far from the Spanish border. It is a working class town with a long history of industrial activity, having been the producer of shoes for much of the Catalan region of France. These shoes, called espudrilles (material topped, lace up at the ankles with rope soles) had been made for centuries in small workshop/cottage industries. Times have changed, however, with espudrilles mostly demanded now by the tourist trade and for export. Business has been badly effected.

In late 1978, 29 unemployed workers formed a SCOP (initials for Workers Co-op in French). Most of them had been made redundant when the owner of their firm "retired" and closed it down. The SCOP (business name Vallee Verte) had done well and was nearly a year old when I visited and spent several worthwhile hours there. I took a lot of notes and I think a lot can be learnt from this SCOP's story.

The manager, Monsieur Beynet, tough, gregarious, early fifties, was an open man, though much more interested in doing some sort of business deal with me than discussing Co-ops (and why not!). He was a Frenchman whereas all the workers were Catalans. He still felt like a bit of an outsider but he was the workers choice and he'd done them well by my reckoning. Interestingly, his family had been involved with SCOPs for four generations - his great grandfather had been transported for having the audacity to organise a Workers Co-op in the 1870's. Mr Beynet's motivation was of a Christian Socialist line and he'd already had many years in both the shoe industry and in developing SCOPs. He'd be very rich if he'd had a personal profit motive.

He had first come to St Laurent in 1978 to try and save the towns only other SCOP which had been manufacturing shoes since 1923. This SCOP broke up, however, mostly because it had lost its motivation and its 30 workers were outnumbered by ex workers, retired members and community supporters who retained shares in it. In Mr Beynets words "When you have 300 turning up to annual meetings, few of whom have actual involvement in the SCOP, it is hard to go ahead." Although none of the workers in Vallee Verte were from the old Co-op, they have decided this won't happen to them. Workers, if they leave (or retire) will have their shares refunded. Only SCOP workers will be members.

So Beynet and the workers (they are of all ages with as many men as women) have together been building another SCOP from scratch. It is financed partly by the members who have invested into it their old firms redundancy payments. The machinery also came as a bonus. They have new premises, rented but cramped, though they have their eye on purchasing a new place soon. A small Government "Decentralization" grant was made available and the rest of the capital was borrowed from the Co-operative Bank (short term loans). Finance could also have taken up from a local bank. Each member at present has an unequal share in the SCOP, though each have one vote. A bye law states that each members share should be equal at a minimum of 5000 francs (approx \$1000). Few workers have this amount in as "stake" so there is a compulsory savings scheme to achieve it within two years. Those few members above the minimum will be refunded the difference when all the loans have been repaid.

The SCOP is producing about 20 different types of cheap summer shoes (material/synthetic soles) ranging from upmarket sandshoes to "Double Bay" strap types. The workers are involved in the design and variety decisions, though the market dictates which ones sell. They will change their product line (new designs) every year to avoid competition from big business. Most of the market research so far has been done by the manager. The strong Federation of SCOPs (over 700 member SCOPs, 12 regional offices and 47 field workers) provides technical market research services every 3 or 4 months and finances market studies. As a result, Vallee Verte already had sales throughout France and were exporting to Holland and Japan. They have one travelling salesman, don't belong to a trade association (there isn't one) and prefer lots of small customers to a few big ones. With

their first year nearly up, a major review of operations was to be undertaken with appropriate adjustments to be made to markets, production, workers skills and finances. Diversification into other manufactured products was not regarded as possible in this town (though this could be traditional shoemaking thinking!). A budgetted turnover of \$800,000 was forecast for 1980, their second year of operation. In Mr Beynet's words "The most important aspect for any SCOP is the market. You should not start a SCOP unless you are sure of the market."

After the market, Mr Beynet considers motivation and motivating the next most important, with the training of workers the least complicated aspect. Regarding motivation it appears similar to our development concepts, though Beynet had some pretty strong statements here like "The manager would be better to be seen as a brute without right to fail" which he balances out with "I must bully like a rhinoceros." Seems like they do a fair bit of pushing themselves along! "Who you have as manager is very very important - the persons role is to motivate and teach people what Co-ops are all about." If he is successful at this, Beynet sees his development role will not be needed after 2 or 3 years as the workers will be able to run the business themselves (with strong support from Federation) with one from their own ranks as manager. "The young, enthusiastic ones will make this so." Indeed the motivated, group action feeling in the workplace nearly overpowered this Australian on his leisurely holiday.

Needless to say, member turnover is low (and not because there is nothing else to do in town!). There was a continual process of skills upgrading with newer and better varieties of shoes to be made (skills training being of "the learning by doing" process, though there were two apprentices). Wages were also higher than in the old firm and they have access to better pension, sickness, holiday and social service benefits (via the Federation controlled schemes and holiday resorts). Prospects are doubtless good and profits will be shared equally when all the loans have been paid off. The members job security is up to their own efforts, which they must feel good about as they are willing to back this feeling of job security with a fairly high capital stake from their own pockets. They are certainly committed to owning their own job. Another motivating factor is the strong working class solidarity arising from the traditions of the town. They were there to prove that a worker with his work is as good as an employer with his money. Of course, they had excellent local support, though some were quite envious of the SCOPs success.

The SCOP regards itself as being administered in much the same way as any other business firm, following the same business conventions and paying the same taxes. The only difference was that the Board of Directors was made up entirely of workers who were elected by their fellows. Decisions on policy are made at often held general meetings, though on a day to day basis the manager is responsible for the decisions to be made. The workers work in small self managing teams. The core group of Co-op "leaders" is important in the functioning of these teams.

Of major interest to Co-ops in Australia is the French Co-op law that 1% of turnover must be spent on training and education, either within the Co-op or by sending members on practical training courses. Also 0.03% of turnover goes to the Federation for their services and for their development of new SCOPs. This amount is tax deductible. Mr Beynet had been on a Federation Management course for three days every month for the last 5 months. One of the workers also talked of their system of Co-operative education - a series of awareness raising sessions to overcome their "employee mentality". This can be a slow process (for some reason they had not yet made use of the Federation's courses) especially if you had spent a lot of time working in the old firm. "The education system in France perpetuates the employer/employee way of thinking and only slow active Co-operative education overcomes it." Also most of the SCOPs workers were members of their trade union, which supported the SCOP and its system of meetings to arbitrate on issues and members differences.

In France workers have a two hour lunch break so one of the other good things going on in town was the workers restaurant run on Consumer Co-operative lines. It provides variations of terrific meals (up to five courses) with wine (from a Co-op of course) for a maximum of \$6. The towns first SCOP was apparently

instrumental in also forming a Co-op grocery shop (now defunct) and this restaurant/bar, which, in line with Co-operative principles was there for maximum service not maximum profit, thus giving greatest benefit to their members.

Anyway at this lunch, Mr Beynet in the midst of much anecdote swapping, stressed two further points. The first: Co-operative philosophy is based on community making, not only in the economic sense but also in the social sense. Unfortunately economic development, because it is more easily measured and understood, tends to dominate all social aspects to the point of their neglect. To overcome this Co-operatives must search out their social objectives and try and measure their success in attaining them. Important here is the quality of life in the workplace and employment and ownership issues.

The second is that Co-operatives are part of a movement over 150 years old so they must work together and support each other as they have done in the past. This working together between members is not only local, but national and international. As an example, while I was in Mr Beynets office, a phone call came in from the centre of France from another SCOP seeking support for a SCOP called SCOPELEC, a manufacturer of electric welding equipment, which was "being squeezed" (their words) by a large firm seeking to take it over. Vallee Verte immediately became an agent for the sale of SCOPELEC goods and promised aid if "the crisis" worsened. I also got taken up by the Co-operative fervour and am now an "agent" for SCOPELEC (I have their sales brochures!). Vallee Verte have also made an offer to sell for a very low fee (2% of turnover) all of the best selling designs and production knowhow to any Worker Co-op in Australia interested in manufacturing any of their shoes. If anybody is interested you can contact me. Vallee Verte will have many years of success ahead of it as a SCOP and I wish the workers all the best.

AUBURN WORK COLLECTIVE.



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DEFINITIONS OF CO-OPERATORS

A Co-operator: A person concerned as much about the others as himself.

A Competitor: A person concerned about the others only in comparison to himself.

An Individual: A person concerned only with himself.

Every time a man puts a new idea across, he finds ten men who thought of it before he did - but they only thought of it.

HENRY G. WEAVER

THE MARKET PLACE

Should any Co-operative have goods, equipment or services for sale you can use this section to advise other Co-operatives of details, price, conditions and contact address.

Copy to be supplied by the fifteenth (15th) of each month.

FOR SALE

1 x 1969 Holden Station Sedan
1 x Remington Manual Typewriter
1 x Filing Cabinet
2 x Adding Machines
2 x Desks
3 x Office Chairs
4 x General Purpose Chairs
1 x Numatic Vacuum Cleaner
1 x Rotobac Floor Polisher
Various Brooms, Brushes, Buckets and Sundry Cleaning Materials

We invite you to contact us regarding details on the above by writing to:

Editor - "Worklink",
C/- Co-operative Federation of N.S.W. Ltd.,
G.P.O. Box 1758, SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2001.
Or Phone: 231 5014

WANTED

Answering machine to provide after hours and weekend service to Work Co-operatives. Machine may be second-hand but in very good order and reliable. Phone: 27 8585 with details.

WANTED

Accommodation for Work Co-operative members while visiting Sydney or conversely whilst in the country. Send details for file to the Editor.

CONTRIBUTIONS

REMEMBER:-

You are invited to contribute to your newspaper. Yes! you should see this as your newspaper. You should regard it as a means of communicating your ideas and ideals to other Co-operatives.

CORRESPONDENCE

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